



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures

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**GROWER NEIGHBOR RELATIONS
SUGGESTIONS FOR PESTICIDE APPLICATIONS
NEAR HOMES, SCHOOLS, AND OTHER SENSITIVE SITES**

Agriculturalists in San Luis Obispo County face many challenges in producing food and horticultural products that benefit everyone. Some of the greatest challenges are land use issues involving urban and rural residents and the farming community. A pesticide application near residents intensifies this challenge and often results in complaints and animosity between neighbors. It is our goal to assist pesticide applicators in developing ways to be sensitive to neighbors' concerns when using pesticides. The intent of these recommendations is to increase awareness and to encourage the safe use of pesticides in all settings.

Suggestions and Possible *Voluntary* Solutions Concerning Pesticide Use in General:

1. Take the first step to talk with neighbors! Explain your agricultural operation: what you do, when you do things and why you do them. Explain the seasonal nature of possible increased traffic, noise, dust and pesticide use. If you use pesticides, *voluntarily* give your neighbors notification of pending applications. Explain that weather conditions usually dictate your schedule and predicting the exact time of a particular application may be difficult. If you make applications at night, notify your neighbors so they don't think you are hiding from them or anyone else. An easy way to provide notification to several neighbors is to help them develop a "phone tree call-down list" which means applicators call one neighbor and that person calls the rest of the neighbors. *Voluntary* notification is intended to keep neighbors informed and may also address the non-pesticide nuisance complaints such as early morning noise. Notification DOES NOT preclude mitigation of off-site drift. Explain to neighbors the reasons applicators wear protective clothing. If you hire applicators keep them informed of any arrangements you have made with neighbors.
2. Some complaints we receive involve odors from pesticide applications. Be aware if your pesticide has an obnoxious chemical odor. Though an odor may not be actual physical drift off your property, the smell can travel a long way, affecting multiple neighbors. Your smelly application at the very least can cause your neighbors to be awakened in the middle of the night or worse to have headaches and other illnesses. It is best to make your applications when there is some wind blowing away from neighbors and other sensitive areas. Be aware of weather conditions creating temperature inversions which restrict vertical air mixing causing both odors and small suspended droplets to remain close to the ground and move laterally off target in a concentrated cloud. We are obligated to respond to all complaints from the public.
3. Consider making applications when neighbors are normally gone for the day. Avoid making applications on weekends, holidays, or adjacent to roads during high traffic periods or during local events or festivals that may bring large numbers of bicyclists or joggers near your property.
4. Establish a relationship with the administrative staff of any nearby schools or other similar institutions. Keeping open communication lines can prevent many problems from occurring.
5. Explore alternative pest control methods that may reduce or eliminate the need for pesticides. Let your neighbors know the positive things you are doing like incorporating Integrated Pest Management strategies.
6. Ask your chemical supplier or PCA about new chemicals or alternative formulations that reduce the potential for off-site drift. For example, switch from a dusting formulation of sulfur to a wettable sulfur.
7. Consider planting a vegetative screen adjacent to neighboring property or leave an unplanted/untreated buffer area. If the topography and culture of the crop allows, change the planting direction of rows: it may be better to have length of rows rather than ends of rows along neighboring property lines.

8. For liquid applications, upgrade your spray equipment with nozzles that are designed to reduce drift. Make applications when airflow is away from neighboring property. Consider the use of hand-held spray equipment as a substitute to power equipment particularly in buffer zones.
9. If you would like some assistance, an Inspector from our office can conduct inspections of your pesticide applications, which may help verify the application was done in a safe and legal manner. Call us to request a “Voluntary Compliance Inspection” which gives you the opportunity to work with an Inspector to verify compliance and to discuss voluntary neighbor notification issues.
10. Get involved in land use planning permitting processes that may affect your farming activities, and become familiar with the County’s Right to Farm Ordinance limitations. (Information can be found on our Website at: www.slocounty.ca.gov/agcomm).

Restricted Pesticides:

The County Agricultural Commissioner has the authority to condition the use of restricted material pesticides. Placing special conditions on Restricted Material Permits does this. In the development of permit conditions, County Ag Inspectors usually visit sites to be treated and work closely with applicators to evaluate and address sensitive sites. The proximity of occupied dwellings, application methods and equipment (aerial verses ground applications for example), alternative methods, topography of the site, and weather conditions are examples of factors evaluated. A “sensitive site” designation by the Ag Inspector indicates a situation exists that may warrant extra precautions such as additional permit conditions. Neighbor notification may be required to inform the public about pesticide applications which are close to occupied dwellings, schools, etc. Applicators or growers, not staff from the Agricultural Commissioner’s office, are responsible for neighbor notification.

Non-Restricted Pesticides:

The County Agricultural Commissioner does not generally condition the use of non-restricted materials, unless the Commissioner determines that its use will present an undue hazard when used under local conditions. As with any pesticides, applicators are responsible to follow all label requirements and to avoid off-site drift. At times it may be necessary or just a good, neighborly approach for applicators to go beyond normal precautions including notification of neighbors of pending pesticide applications. Growers that have used this approach have had good success. Contact your industry association for linkage to peers that may assist you.

The California Public Records Act:

The County Agricultural Commissioner frequently receives requests from the public for information about pesticide applications. Examples of commonly requested documents include copies of growers’ Restricted Materials Permits, pending Notices of Intent, Use Reports, records of enforcement action and investigations. These documents, and many others, are considered “public records”. Because of the California Public Records Act (Government Code Section 6250-6268) mandates, the Commissioner must provide certain public records upon request. The cost for completion of these requests is recovered through a fee for computer time and photocopies. (In some situations, the Commissioner may notify you of documents that were released in response to a request).

Please let us know about creative solutions you have developed so we may pass them along to others. For more information contact one of our offices:

San Luis Obispo Main Office: 781-5910
Arroyo Grande District Office: 473-7090
Templeton District Office: 434-5950